
LOWER DAYTON'S BLUFF

Small Area Plan and Forty Acre Study

Developed by the Lower Bluff Small Area Plan Task Force

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PLAN BRIEF

Lower Dayton's Bluff Small Area Plan and Forty Acre Study Redevelopment Plan

Purpose

The Lower Bluff Small Area Plan was developed by a neighborhood based task force appointed by the Saint Paul Planning Commission. It recommends land use controls and investment strategies to strengthen the Lower Bluff as an historic low density residential community. Major premises of the plan include:

- To the extent possible, development in the community should be architecturally compatible with the existing historic structures.
- As it has since the early part of the century, the community should continue to provide homes for families of various incomes.
- The existing housing stock should be improved.
- Compatible neighborhood commercial uses should be established.

Redevelopment and Public Investment

The Small Area Plan and a companion Redevelopment Plan provide for public involvement in the area's revitalization. Major activities will center around the intersection of Third and Maria and may include:

- Development of a neighborhood commercial center.
- Redevelopment of the two blocks closest to the river with residential uses.
- Rehabilitation of surrounding residential blocks. Some rental structures may be acquired, renovated and managed by the community based Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services.
- Development of attractive streetscapes.

Land Use and Zoning

To insure that the development and redevelopment of land in the area is consistent with the plan, rezoning of substantial portions of the study area is proposed.

- Most areas zoned RM-2 Multiple Family will be rezoned to RT-1 Two Family. The effect of the change will be to prohibit the conversion of one and two family structures to structures with three or more units. Similarly, parcels cannot be assembled and developed with multiple family buildings.

- The commercial land surrounding the intersection of Hudson and Bates will be rezoned to RT-1 Two Family to encourage the eventual redevelopment of the area with residential uses.
- The land zoned B-3 General Business at the intersection of Maria and Maple would be rezoned to B-2 Community Business to ensure greater compatibility with the residential character of the community.

Questions

Please direct any questions about the plan -- or requests for additional copies of the plan -- to Nancy Homans of the Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development at 228-3372.

July 1990

INTRODUCTION

Purpose. This plan addresses a thirty seven block area referred to as Lower Dayton's Bluff, bounded generally by Mounds Boulevard, I-94, Swede Hollow and the crest of the hill marked roughly by Hope Street. Developed by a neighborhood task force, the plan does two things. First, it is a land use plan in which the task force proposes an overall rezoning of property to protect the neighborhood's lower density residential character. Secondly, the plan lays out a long term investment strategy focused on the residential and commercial revitalization of the neighborhood.

The task force worked within the context of the Near East Side Improvement Strategy (NIS) -- a community-wide effort, adopted in July 1989, to set redevelopment priorities for the larger Near East Side area. Where the NIS assigned responsibility for accomplishing objectives to various organizations, this plan defines strategies for the implementation of those objectives in the Lower Bluff area.

This plan is accompanied by a Redevelopment Plan prepared by the Saint Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) for a seventeen block area within the larger study area. Federal law requires the preparation of such a plan before the City can undertake certain redevelopment activities suggested by the neighborhood task force.

Current land use. From its earliest days, the Lower Bluff has been a residential community. An area settled in the latter part of the last century -- first, in the 1860s, by prominent Saint Paul families who built mansions overlooking the river and later by middle class households buying land as it was subdivided by their wealthier neighbors -- the Lower Bluff is characterized by "a side by side intermingling of mechanics' cottages with more stylistically distinguished larger houses, short rowhouses and local user businesses." (Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission Report, p. 31) While much of the residential land is now zoned for multifamily use, almost ninety percent of the structures are one and two family homes. In addition there are three commercial centers -- two located in the heart of the community and a third along East Seventh Street.

Problems and opportunities. The neighborhood's strengths lie in its stock of affordable and architecturally distinct housing, scenic views, proximity to such major employers as 3M and Nobles Industries and access to downtown. The recent decisions by Metro State University and Lakewood Community College to locate in the heart of the community have bolstered its confidence in the future. Its struggles relate to an increasingly diverse population, an aging physical infrastructure, and the loss of several major employers.

Neighborhood Goals. The task force identified a number of major objectives for the neighborhood. Although developed independently, each of the task force goals mirrors a community goal articulated in the NIS. Priorities include:

- Improve the rental housing stock;
- Increase the percentage of owner occupied units;
- Establish a user-friendly commercial area;
- Develop attractive streetscapes, pocket parks, and gateways; and
- Build solid community ties particularly with and among Southeast Asian residents and the neighborhood's young people.

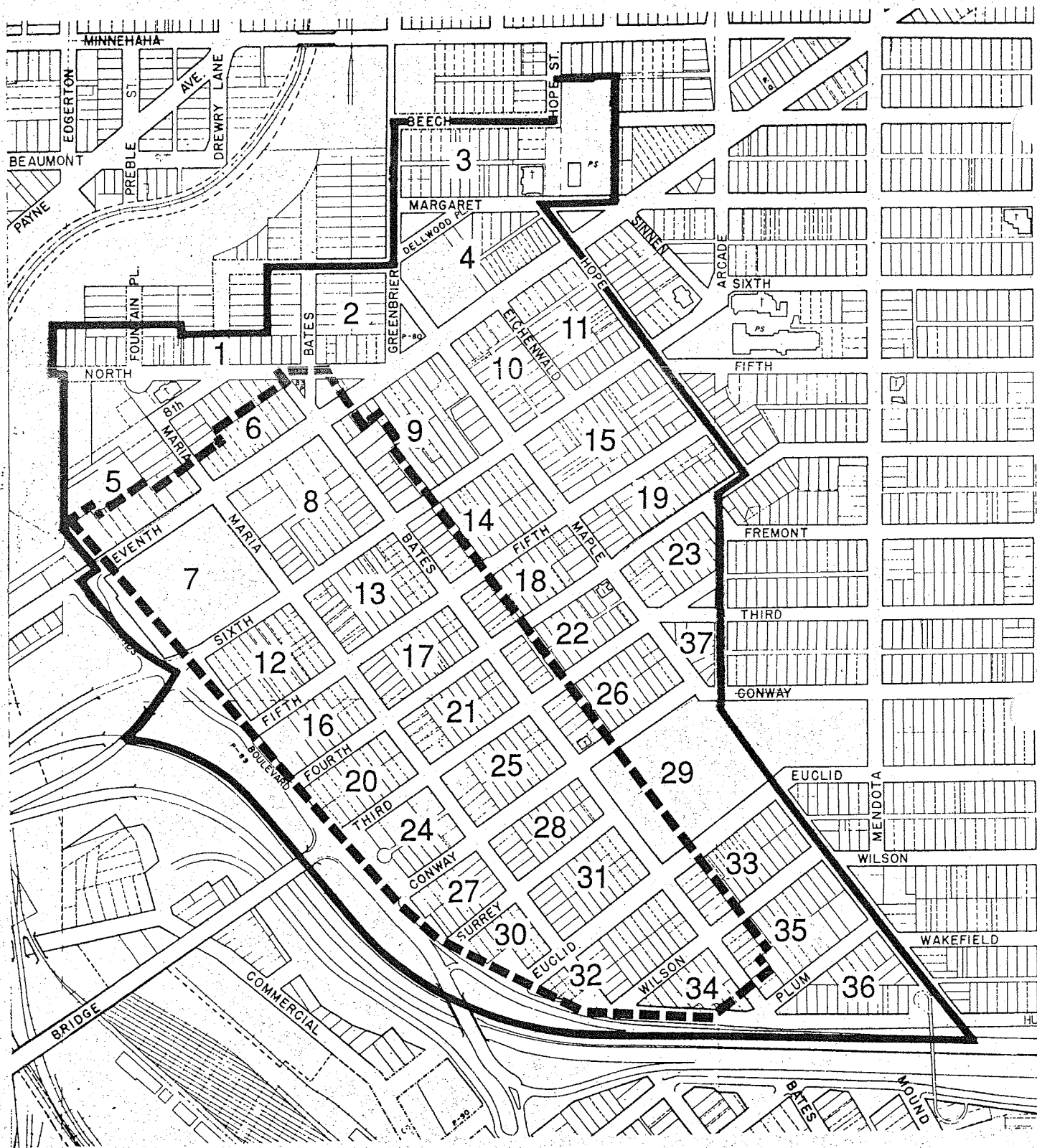


Figure 1
Lower Dayton's Bluff Small Area and Redevelopment Plan

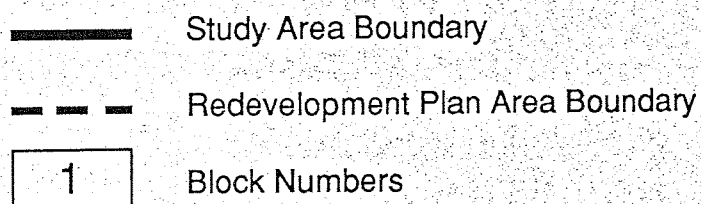
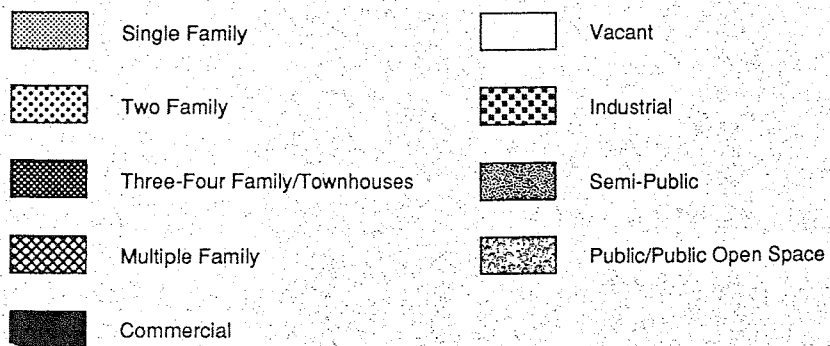




Figure 2
Existing Land Use



MARKET ANALYSIS

Residential Market. There are almost one thousand housing units in 492 residential structures in the Lower Bluff community. One half of the structures are single family homes, 85 percent of which are homesteaded. Another 37 percent are two family structures, over half of which are homesteaded.

Housing conditions vary widely throughout the neighborhood. Of the 228 residential structures in the Redevelopment Plan area, 31 percent are in excellent condition while 45 percent are in need of major repair or rehabilitation. (The detailed exterior condition survey was conducted only in the Redevelopment Plan area where the housing is in generally poorer condition than in the neighborhood as a whole.) While there is some concentration of the seriously dilapidated buildings around the core, a map of building conditions indicates a range of types on almost every block.

The high percentage of two-family structures -- they represent a proportion three and a half times that in the city as a whole -- presents the community with a number of both challenges and opportunities. Forty percent of its rental units are located in duplexes. In many respects, duplexes provide attractive options to renter households. They often have more space than a typical rental unit, provide immediate access to the outdoors, and are less likely to be encumbered by the stresses of multiple family structures.

MLS sales data, however, provide indications that the duplex market is under stress. Of the twenty eight duplexes listed for sale in 1989, only seven were sold. Of the seven, those that sold within two months of the listing, sold for as little as fifty percent of their estimated market value. The remainder, which sold for prices approximating the market value, had been on the market for up to two years.

Poor market conditions only serve to intensify a number of other pressures on duplex owners. They often have little experience with rental management and high taxes on non-homesteaded rental property often means that the owner cannot maintain a sufficient cash flow to ensure the upkeep of the building. Indeed, the building condition data indicate that 59 percent of the 86 duplexes in the Redevelopment Plan area are in need of major repair or rehabilitation.

Commercial Market. There are three identifiable commercial areas in the neighborhood, encompassing 106,000 square feet of space:

East Seventh Street serves a regional market with office space, car dealers, auto parts stores, and fast food restaurants. The study area encompasses only 27,336 square feet of a considerably longer commercial strip. The space within the study area, however, may increasingly be home to uses which serve the new Metro State/Lakewood complex and may wrap around the campus onto vacant land on Sixth Street.

The intersection of Third and Maria with its 60,000 square feet of commercial space has traditionally served a more limited neighborhood market and has faced substantial change in the past several years. At this point, one half (51 percent) of the space is vacant. Most recently, the 15,000 square foot Country Club Market, fell victim to changes in the grocery business and closed its doors in mid-October. By the end of 1989, Roma Bakery on the corner of Third and Bates, was out of operation.

The Country Club and Roma Bakery closings leave a laundromat, two bars and an Asian Food market located further up Third Street as the only businesses which draw their patrons from the immediate neighborhood. The other major uses serve automobiles (generally through car dealers) or are offices for businesses which do not relate to the surrounding community.

Among the problems contributing to the high vacancy rate, according to building owners in the area, are a lack of convenient parking and a perception of crime. Market analysts from the Economic Research Corporation point also to a lack of "synergy between existing businesses whereby customers attracted to one store shop at nearby stores."

Among the area's commercial strengths are its artisans -- including Dick Huss whose glass studio and retail outlet is located at Third and Maple -- and the possibility that the distinctive architecture and lower rents may attract others to help expand the commercial center's trade area.

The community places considerable value on having a healthy commercial center at its core. Their reasons range from a philosophical conviction that a percentage of a neighborhood's commercial needs should be able to be met without having to drive outside of the neighborhood to a practical concern for residents for whom the major commercial centers are not accessible.

Data provided by the Economic Research Corporation indicate sufficient market potential to support a small (8,000 - 10,000 square feet) neighborhood commercial center, probably anchored by a convenience grocery store. The vacant Country Club site provides an opportunity to develop such a center.

The consultants caution, however, that the success of a center will depend on the success of other revitalization activities in the neighborhood. They further suggest that development of such a center should perhaps be staged after a convenience grocery and the surrounding neighborhood have demonstrated improved market conditions.

The third area is located at Hudson Road and Bates Avenue and is heavily dominated by automobile related uses -- a Honda motor cycle dealer, two auto body shops and a towing firm. Where the area once served many neighborhood needs, a number of the commercial buildings have been converted to residential use and those that remain do not tend to serve a neighborhood market:

Merchants in this area discussed a perception of crime and the absence of a visual presence as major concerns for the future.

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The following are general recommendations developed in dialogue with the community. As the revitalization process proceeds, the community should participate in both the solicitation and review of development proposals.

Residential Areas

Third Street Gateway Blocks (Blocks 20 and 24):

1. Convert the two Third Street Gateway blocks to residential use. The conversion from mixed commercial/residential use to residential use is consistent with the finding in the market analysis that there is a surplus of commercial space in the area relative to demand. It will also give the area a stronger identity as a residential community.
2. 291-299 Maria. The structures at 291-299 Maria present a unique opportunity to reflect the area's historic character. The neighborhood, therefore, will explore all possibilities for their reuse.
3. Vacant land on the blocks should be developed with compatibly designed new housing. Market conditions and the impact of traffic noise on the site -- as well as the critical role this area plays in the community -- mean that the nature of the housing and its design should be carefully considered.
4. New housing should be developed in such a way as to represent the eclectic architectural character of the community, rather than the static character of many attempts at replicating historic communities.
5. In the event that market conditions are not conducive to the redevelopment of the blocks in the short term, interim uses which mitigate their blighting influence should be explored.

Inner Ring Areas (Blocks 17, 21, 25, 28)

6. The NHS or the City may purchase available structures for rehabilitation and community based management as affordable rental housing. The inner ring is characterized by heavy concentrations of absentee owned duplexes in deteriorating conditions. The objective is to stabilize the area's rental housing in order to provide a supportive context for the redevelopment of the gateway blocks.
7. Incentives for conversions of absentee owned property to owner occupancy should be designed and marketed.

Pockets of incipient decline (Blocks 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17):

8. The NHS and City should target rehabilitation loans and grants with an eye toward increasing owner occupancy and/or deconverting two family structures to single family use. These are areas with comparatively higher proportions of owner occupancy and a significant percentage of structures in good conditions. They are areas, however, where the deterioration of one or two structures could result in more serious disinvestment.
9. Clearance under the City's Vacant Housing Initiative should be pursued particularly in areas of high density, but only after giving careful consideration given to the historical or architectural significance of the structures.

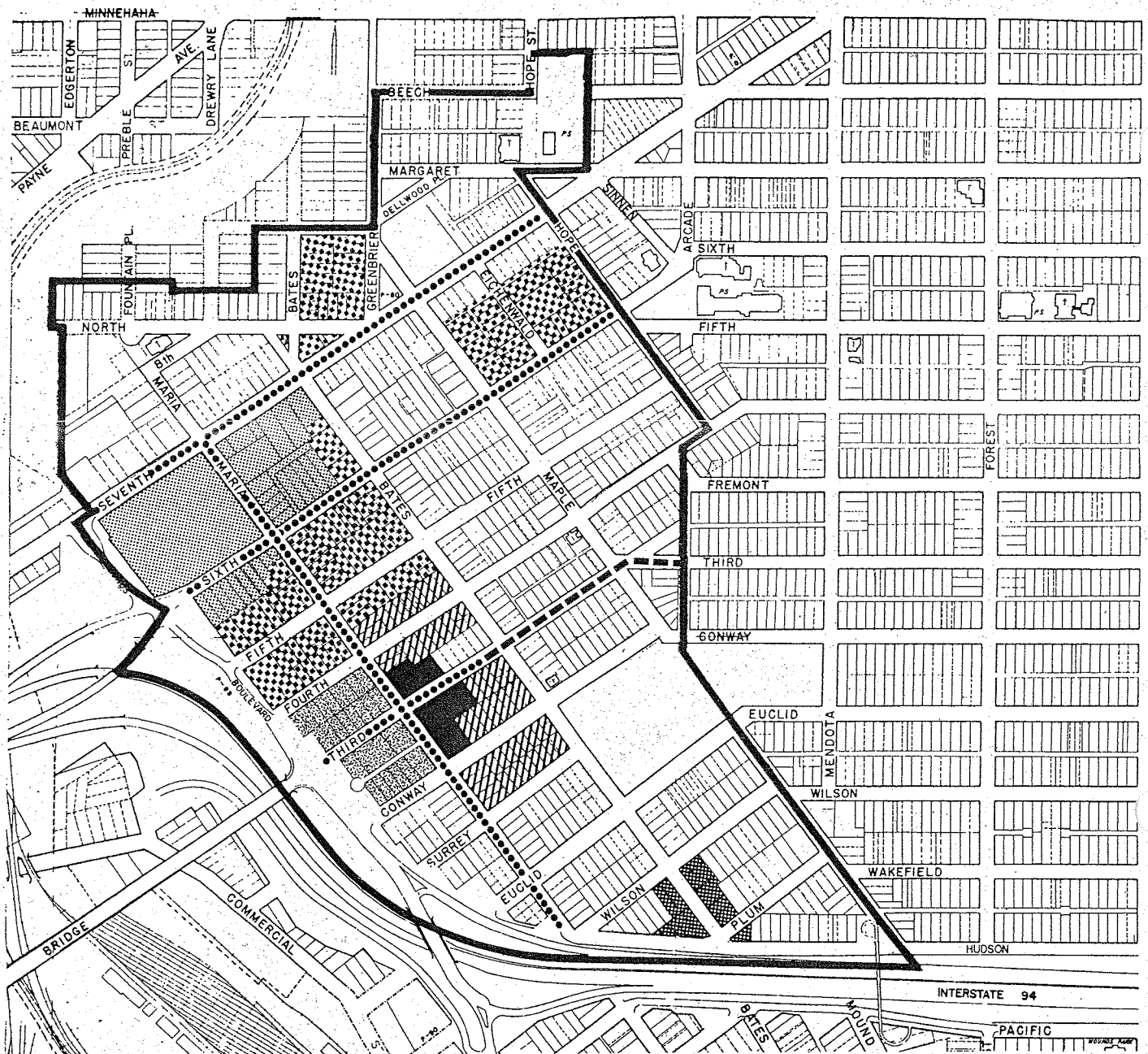


Figure 4
Revitalization Strategies

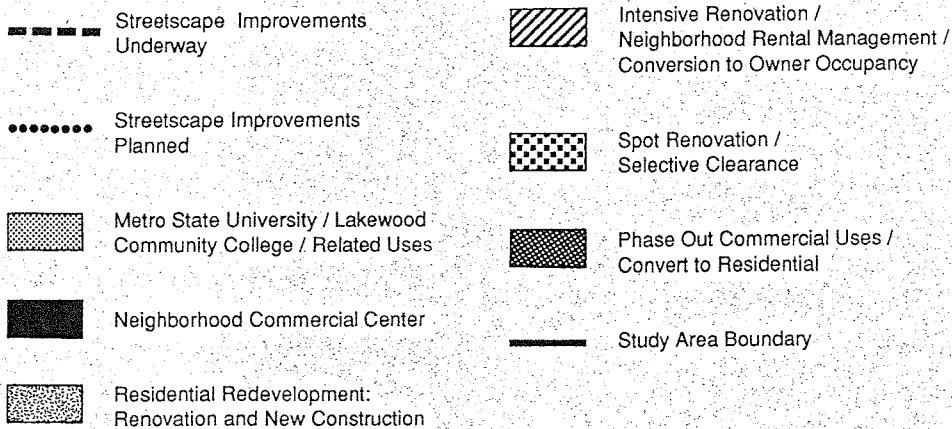
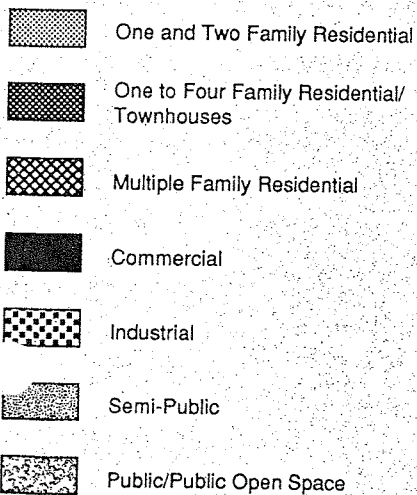




Figure 5
Proposed Land Use



Commercial Areas

10. A Neighborhood Commercial Center should be developed on the northeast and southeast corners of the intersection of Third and Maria.
11. Alternatives to develop adequate parking to support commercial establishments on the northeast corner should be explored.
12. On the vacant Country Club site, the first priority should be to aggressively pursue independent grocers who may be interested in either using the existing structure (with exterior renovation to make it more compatible with the surrounding neighborhood) or building a new structure after the existing building is demolished.
13. If such efforts are unsuccessful, a Request for Proposals from developers of convenience groceries should be prepared. Key neighborhood standards for the preferred development of such a store relate to its operation and design. They include:

Standards of Operation

- a) Not open 24-hours per day
- b) No gas pumps

Design Standards

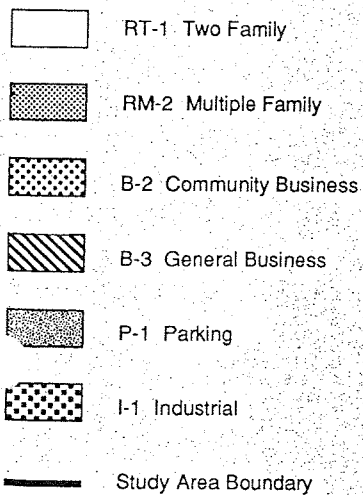
- a) Building design and signage should be compatible with surrounding neighborhood.
 - b) Parking should be screened.
 - c) Lighting should promote safety and be compatible with streetscape design.
14. Other uses which might be attracted to help define the neighborhood commercial center are: medical offices, dispensing pharmacy, dry cleaner, and a "destination place" (e.g. restaurant, artisan studio, movie theater).
 15. Merchants in the commercial center should develop means of complementing one another through, for example, joint marketing, common design themes, or shared parking.

Land Use and Zoning

16. Portions of two intersections (Bates and Euclid and Bates and Third) which currently have multifamily buildings and the site of the Wilder care facility should retain RM-2 zoning.
17. Portions of two gateway blocks along the river (a portion of the northern 1/2 of Block 20 and the northern 1/2 of Block 24) should be rezoned RT-2 to allow for the construction of townhouses in the event that townhouses represent the most reasonable reuse of the land.



Figure 6
Existing Zoning



18. The remainder of the residentially zoned land should be zoned for RT-1 two family use.
19. The commercially zoned land on the south end of Bates Avenue also should be re-zoned to RT-1 (two family).
20. The intersection of Third and Hope Streets, presently zoned B-3, should be rezoned to B-2 to ensure that future commercial development is more neighborhood-based in character.
21. The City should develop appropriate zoning regulations to ensure the preservation of major views from the Lower Bluff of the river and downtown.

Other

22. Key structures which contribute to the historic character of the community should be renovated whenever such renovation is determined to be economically feasible.
23. The Minnesota Legislature should approve funding for the completion of the Metro State University/Lakewood Community College campus.
24. Neighborhood representatives should participate in the review of designs for the new campus to ensure compatibility with the surrounding residential neighborhood.
25. Streetscape plans, compatible with that developed for Third Street, should be developed for Maria Avenue and Sixth and Seventh Streets.
26. Area social service agencies and schools should coordinate their efforts to address the human service, education and employment needs of neighborhood households and promote community stability.